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SOME FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF JAPANESE EDUCATION

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The western world has always greatly admired the persistent and universal enthusiasm with which the Japanese "apply themselves unto learning," and all the world has greatly marveled at the patriotic devotion with which the whole people has given itself to war in the defense of the nation's life. It has been apparent that some deep-seated spring of inspiration has been drawn on by every soul in the empire, that some leaven has been at work on the very molecular structure of the social organism, to achieve so thorough and complete a unanimity of purpose in a whole people. This has been attributed to religion, but no religion is so universal as this devotion would imply; and Buddhist, Confucian, Taoist, Christian, and atheist differ not one whit when it comes to this matter of devotion to education and the advancement of the empire.

Among all the social and psychic forces which have been cited as responsible for this splendid attitude, there is one document, the Imperial Rescript on Education, of such far-reaching importance as to deserve the most careful appreciation on our part. It is one of the world's great documents and there are few enough of such powerful instruments in the treasures of the Occident.

It was my very good fortune to travel as one of the representatives of our government on a long tour of nearly eleven thousand miles back and forth across our continent with the Honorary Commercial Commissioners of Japan during the autumn of 1909. The Japanese party consisted of about sixty financiers and business men, divided into groups according to

their various interests. One of the leading men of the party was Baron Naibu Kanda, professor of English in the Peers' School of Tokyo, and one of the leading literary men of Japan. Baron Kanda came as a boy of eleven to this country, thirty-odd years ago, one of the first of that long list of youths who have come to us eager for our education. He graduated from a high school and from Amherst College, with honors, and speaks and writes our language like a native.

Baron Kanda was most interested in our educational institutions, and as the American member of the party assisting the educational group I had a good opportunity to observe the Japanese attitude toward educational ideals. The baron brought as his chief message to our universities, colleges, and schools the Imperial Rescript on Education. Wherever he addressed the students he told them the story of the rescript and the part it plays in Japanese life.

The copies of the rescript he brought were artistically printed on fine Japanese paper suitable for framing, one half of the page being a copy of the original in the Japanese characters, the other half a translation into English. (The baron was one of the committee chosen by the government to put the rescript into literary form in English.) At the close of each address to American students the baron presented to the school the copy of the rescript from which he read, so that it could be framed and hung where it might be read and reread by successive generations of students.

From Baron Kanda's many presentations and comments it became clear that this rescript plays a very important part in the current thought in Japan. It is the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Declaration of Independence, all in one. It is read with veneration in every school, as part of the daily exercises. On a public occasion, such as a celebration or the laying of a cornerstone, it is read as part of the ceremony. It is memorized by every boy, and it has the unqualified reverence of every individual in the nation.

The text of the rescript is as follows:

IMPERIAL RESCRIPT ON EDUCATION
OF THE
EMPIRE OF JAPAN

Know ye, Our Subjects:

Our Imperial Ancestors have founded Our Empire on a basis broad and everlasting and have deeply and firmly implanted virtue; Our subjects ever united in loyalty and filial piety have from generation to generation illustrated the beauty thereof. This is the glory of the fundamental character of Our Empire, and herein also lies the source of Our education. Ye, Our subjects, be filial to your parents, affectionate to your brothers and sisters; as husbands and wives be harmonious, as friends true; bear yourselves in modesty and moderation; extend your benevolence to all; pursue learning and cultivate arts, and thereby develop intellectual faculties and perfect moral powers; furthermore advance public good and promote common interests; always respect the Constitution and observe the laws; should emergency arise, offer yourselves courageously to the State; and thus guard and maintain the prosperity of Our Imperial Throne coeval with heaven and earth. So shall ye not only be Our good and faithful subjects, but render illustrious the best traditions of your forefathers.

The Way here set forth is indeed the teaching bequeathed by Our Imperial Ancestors, to be observed alike by Their Descendants and the subjects, infallible for all ages and true in all places. It is Our wish to lay it to heart in all reverence, in common with you, Our subjects, that we may all thus attain to the same virtue.

The 30th day of the 10th month of the 23rd year of Meiji.

(Imperial Sign Manual. Imperial Seal.)